

Farrel Farm (Larson Farm)
7381 N. Washington Street
Denver Vicinity
Adams County
Colorado

HABS No. C0-59

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE FARREL FARM (LARSON FARM)

Location: 7381 North Washington Street, Denver Vicinity
Adams County, Colorado.

UTM: A. 13.501900.4408780
B. 13.501900.4408670
C. 13.501790.4408670
D. 13.501790.4408780
(National Register site core area)
Quad: Commerce City, Colorado

Dates of Construction: Main house (c.1901); icehouse, bunkhouse and coal shed (all 1905-15: bunkhouse has small addition to west put on in 1940); large barn (c. 1920 with two successive additions built on to the west in 1948 and 1966); three car garage (1959); two round metal silos (1958); new house moved in to the farm in 1966.

Present Owner: Leonard O. M. Larson
7393 North Washington Street
Denver, Colorado 80229

Present Use: About 14 acres remain of which most is used as pasture (south of the house) and for raising hay (west of the house).

Significance: The Farrel Farm is a distinctive representative of an early truck farm and one of the few good examples remaining. Historically, this region developed into an important locale for truck farming to serve Denver and the mountain communities.

Historian: Kenneth M. Gambrill
Colorado Department of Highways
April, 1982

Introduction

The Farrel Farm at 7381 North Washington Street is a 14-acre truck farm located approximately 2.7 miles north of the Denver city limits in unincorporated Adams County, Colorado. The property is considered significant as a distinctive representative of an early truck farm and one of the best surviving examples in the area north of the state capital. The farm was determined eligible to the National Register under Criterion "A" and is listed under its contemporary name, the Larson Property (SAM77).

Projected growth and development in Denver and Adams Counties have led to consideration of a proposal to widen North Washington Street from a two-lane facility to a four-lane divided arterial with sidewalks, curb and gutter improvements, enclosed storm drainage, and an adjacent bikepath. The Federal Highway Administration is the lead agency in charge of the proposed undertaking, Project M 7731(1), Washington Street North, State Highway 224 to 83rd Avenue, an urban systems project. The Colorado Department of Highways is the state agency directly responsible for preparing the environmental studies and the preliminary engineering for the project on behalf of Adams County.

In accordance with Section 800.3 of the Advisory Council Regulations, the effects of the undertaking on the Farrel Farm (Larson Property) were evaluated. It has been determined that the improvement of North Washington Street from a two-lane to a four-lane roadway has the potential to facilitate a change from agricultural to commercial use of this property. This potential impact constitutes an indirect adverse effect. To mitigate this effect, recordation to NAER standards was prescribed.

Historical Background

The Farrel Farm lies within a region of broadly rolling hills and wide stream valleys. As early as the 1860s, the agricultural potential of the land was recognized and two canals, the Clear Creek and Platte River Canal (now the Lower Clear Creek Canal) and the Colorado Agricultural Canal, were granted water right decrees.¹ Settlement occurred in the late 1860s and the 1870s on large homestead farms which produced mostly hay, grains and garden vegetables.²

During the 1890s much of the land was further subdivided into five- and ten-acre plots to accommodate more intensive truck farming practices.³ Truck farming involves the growing of vegetables for local market distribution and became very common north of Denver just before the turn of the century. At this time large numbers of immigrants, mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe, were drawn to the area by two great gold and silver smelters (the Omaha and Grant Smelter and the Globe Smelter) and by several large meat packing plants. To supplement their incomes, many of the immigrant families farmed small vegetable gardens and delivered their produce to the Denver markets.⁴

By the early 1920s the region had earned the distinction of being the number one producer of vegetables in Adams County, a reputation it held until the 1960s.⁵ In 1923, truck farmers in the area organized the Vegetable Producers Cooperative Association in an effort to insure fair prices for their produce. Commonly called the "Garden Association", this group was one of the first efforts at cooperative vegetable marketing in Colorado.⁶ The target was the Denver market where the majority of the area's produce was and continues to be sold.

Following World War II, the agricultural lands in southern Adams County were subjected to major changes as the Denver metropolitan area steadily expanded. The creation of the planned community of Thornton in 1953, completion of Interstate 25 in the late 1950s, and construction of Interstate 76 (formerly I-80S) in the late 1960s all contributed significantly to land use changes in the area. Many acres of fertile fields were destroyed and dozens of the older families in the area were displaced by new housing developments and an influx of light industry. With development, the value of agricultural land has risen dramatically, further inducing farmers to surrender their land.

The economics of truck farming also suffered reversals after World War II. Following the war many members of the younger generations left the family farms for full-time wage labor occupations in Denver and other urban areas. This decline in family involvement made truck farming more difficult and expensive than it formerly was. As a result, a large number of farmers in the area switched from vegetable gardening to growing alfalfa and grains (which are easier crops to cultivate and harvest) or have left their land unplowed and found jobs elsewhere.⁷

The Farrel Farm is typical in this respect for in recent years the land has been used for pasture and for raising hay. In its present setting, however, it retains the ambiance of the truck farm it once was.

A chain-of-title for the land immediately surrounding the farm house and its outbuildings is attached to this narrative following the list of references. The earliest information of a descriptive nature about the farm is provided by Leonard O. M. Larson, the present owner.⁸ Mr. Larson recalls that Edmund E. Farrel raised dairy cows and was in the butter and egg business while he owned the farm. The Farrel's built the main house around 1900 or 1901 and all of the other buildings except for the three-car garage and the Larson's new house at 7393 North Washington Street. All of the older structures date to around the turn of the century.

The present owner's father and uncle, Leonard and Hjalmar Larson, bought the farm from Mr. Farrel in November, 1918. In January, 1919, the Larson family moved into the main house and raised vegetables on the surrounding land until the end of World War II. Their primary crops were root vegetables such as carrots, turnips, beets, rutabaga, and onions. Following WW II the Larsons switched to growing grains and hay rather than pursue the more labor intensive truck farming activities. They also kept cows and chickens on the property until fairly recently and still have a few horses. Mr. Larson's intention is to continue farming as long as he is able to do so.⁹

Building Descriptions

The following is a description of the present physical appearance of the important structures located on the central core area of the Farrel Farm. Building identification corresponds with the system used on the site plan prepared for this recordation project.

A. Farm House (c. 1901). The main house on the farm is a tall, two-story, cross-gabled, wood-framed farm house of relatively simple vernacular design. The interior of the house was partially gutted by fire in 1972 and since that time the house has been abandoned. On the first floor there was a kitchen, living room, formal dining room with a bay window facing south, a spare bedroom, a bathroom, laundry room, and a small pantry. Upstairs there were four bedrooms and a simple exterior sun deck entered from the northwest bedroom. Two

straight stairways led between floors, one from the front of the house (east) and one from the back (west). The architect and builder are unknown.

The east facade faces onto North Washington Street and features a full open front porch with three modest roof supports. A simple two-level wooden step (one missing) leads to the porch and the front door. Fishscale shingles decorate the gable above a pair of single-pane, double-hung windows. A small semi-circular window provides attic ventilation through the gable and there is decorative but badly weathered bargeboard under the gable eaves.

The north facade has a small screen-enclosed porch extending off the kitchen to the east and a fully enclosed extension of the kitchen to the west. Both have short lean-to rooflines. The gable is decorated with fishscale shingling and bargeboard.

The west facade has a broken plane appearance created by the enclosed kitchen extension and a small laundry room entered from outside the house or from the kitchen. Above the laundry room is the flat sun deck mentioned above. The sun deck has a very simple 1"x4" plank railing and was built with the house.

The south facade features a single-story bay window off the dining room and a single-pane double-hung bedroom window above. The gable is decorated with fishscale shingles and bargeboard and has a small rectangular vent for attic ventilation.

The house has an unfinished half basement and has composition shingles on the roof. Two rectangular brick chimneys are located on the roof, one above the kitchen and one above the dining room. The house is clapboard sided.

To the west and southwest of the farm house there are four small wood-framed structures associated with the early farming activities. All are used for storage at the present time.

B. Coal Shed. The smallest of the support buildings is a vertical plank-sided building with a 45° pitched gable roof. This structure served a dual purpose as coal shed (north half) and outhouse (south half). Two very simple spring hinged Dutch doors on the west side provided original access to the separate halves. These are now nailed shut and have been replaced with two simple wooden house doors on the east side. A single rectangular window on the north wall allowed light to enter. The roof is wood shingled.

C. Bunkhouse. Immediately west of the farm house is a small three-room bunkhouse with a low gable roof. The original building had two rooms with four or five rectangular windows and had doors on the east and south. A small central fireplace was built into the dividing wall between the rooms. Sometime in the early 1940s a small square room was added, offset slightly to the southwest. A south doorway on the addition now serves as the main entrance to the bunkhouse. The original building is clapboard sided while the new addition has horizontal plank siding. The roof has composition shingles.

D. Ice House. Just south of the bunkhouse is the old ice house which served that purpose until about 1915. From around 1915 until the Larson family purchased the farm, the ice house served as a bee house. Slots were cut in the east and west walls of the house to provide entry and exit points for the bees. A small original doorway on the south was replaced many years ago by a pair of hinged garage doors. This small building has vertical plank siding and wood shingles on the gable roof. There are no windows.

E. Garage (c.1901). Southwest of the ice house is an original buggy garage with sliding barn-style doors on the north side. This is a simple rectangular structure with vertical plank siding and a gable roof. There are no windows. A small hinged doorway provides access from the south and the roof is now covered with sheet tin.

F. New Garage (c. 1939). North of the farm house is an automobile garage with three pair of center-opening doors facing south. A small room on the west end now serves as a shop area. When the garage was built in 1939, this room was used as a washing area for vegetables grown on the farm. The washing area was entered from the garage or through a standard house door on the south. The garage and shop are sided with horizontal planks surmounted by a lean-to roof with a gentle slope to the north. The only windows on this building are located on the doors facing south. The roof is covered with sheet tin.

Immediately west of these buildings and separating them from the barn is the lower Clear Creek Canal which originates approximately two miles southwest of the farm in Clear Creek. The canal still carries water an average of 230 days per year and is the primary source of irrigation water for the farm.¹⁰

The banks of the canal are lined with elms, cottonwoods and willows where it passes between the farm buildings and adds immeasurably to the agricultural setting of the property. Two plank footbridges and two driveway culverts cross the canal near the farm buildings.

G. The Barn. The barn is a simple gable-roofed wood frame building which has been modified twice over the years. The original barn is easily distinguished by its greater height and the large gabled ventilator on the roof. Two open bays face south and presumably had sliding or hinged doors when the Farrels and Larsons kept horses and cows here. There are three loft doorways on this part of the barn and three small rectangular 4-pane windows. A single diamond shaped window is located high up on the east gable. Attached to the north side of the barn is an enclosed lean-to storage garage with a single pair of center-opening doors facing east.

The two additions to the barn were made to the west side in around 1948 and in 1966. Each addition added a 22-foot open bay to the barn and an equal extension onto the garage area north of the barn. The total length of the barn is now 80 feet. The roofline of the additions is also a gable with a longer slope to the north. The entire barn roof is covered with sheet tin.

H. New House (1954). To the west of the barn is the new ranch style home in which the Larsons now live. This house was built in 1954 and moved to its present location from the Denver suburb of Northglenn in 1966. An enclosed breezeway connects the house to a two-car garage.

Immediately south of the new house in a small area now set aside for raising vegetables is the site of the original root cellar built by the Farrels. This structure was filled in and plowed over in 1966 and no visible traces remain.

I. Equipment Ramp. 95 feet south of the barn there is an equipment ramp built by the present owner in 1950. It consists of a dirt embankment supported by railroad ties.

J. Silos. 90 feet south of the equipment ramp there are two metal storage silos located on the west bank of the canal. These silos, which stand eighteen feet high, were built on the farm in 1938 and moved to their present location in 1966. Formerly there were four identical structures located where

the new house now stands. When the new house was brought in in 1966, two silos were sold and two were moved to their present location.

Significance

The Farrel Farm is considered significant because it is a distinctive representative of an early truck farm, a type of farming which was important in the history of this area, and of which very few good examples remain. Both its setting and the arrangement of its buildings add to the importance of this farm in a region of rapid land use change.

FOOTNOTES:

1. C. C. Hezmalhalch, Tabulation of Water Right Decrees, State of Colorado (Denver: The Smith-Brooks Printing Company, 1920), pp. 95, 97.
2. Alvin T. Steinel, History of Agriculture in Colorado, 1858 to 1926 (Fort Collins, Colo.: The State Agricultural College, 1926), pp. 53, 62-67; Jerome C. Smiley, Semi-Centennial History of the State of Colorado, 2 vols. (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 1:288.
3. Adams County, Colorado, Clerk and Records Office, Subdivision Filing records; Albin Wagner, Adams County: Crossroads of the West, 2 vols. (Denver: Century Graphics, 1977), 2:36.
4. Wagner, 2:36
5. Wagner, 2:36-37; interview with Albert Saccomano, truck farmer, 7451 North Washington Street, Adams County, Colorado, October 14, 1980.
6. Wagner, 2:36-37
7. Interview with Rose Gacetta, property owner, 7150 North Washington Street, Adams County, Colorado, October 10 and 30, 1980; interview with Albert Saccomano, October 14, 1980; interview with Leonard O. M. Larson, farmer, 7393 North Washington Street, Adams County, Colorado, October 6 and 16, 1980.
8. Interview with Leonard O. M. Larson, farmer and property owner, 7393 North Washington Street, Adams County, Colorado, February 19, 1982. This brief history of the Farrel Farm and the construction dates for the farm buildings are based on interviews conducted with Mr. Larson in October 1980, February 1982 and April 1982.
9. Interview with Leonard O. M. Larson, April 16, 1982.
10. Interview with Dale Anderson, Water Commissioner, Water District 7, Golden, Colorado, April 27, 1982; interview with Leonard O. M. Larson, February 19, 1982.

Farrel (Larson) Farm
Original and Subsequent Owners

References to the chain-of-title to the land upon which the structures stand are in the Office of the Clerk and Recorder for Adams County, Brighton, Colorado.

- 1866 Patent. Recorded November 3, 1883 in Book A40, Page 284.
United States to Greenleaf Page. 160 Acres.
- 1869 Deed. Recorded February 15, 1870 in Book A7, Page 133.
Greenleaf Page and Elmira L. Page to DeKalb Sternberg.
320 Acres.
- 1882 Deed. Recorded July 22, 1882 in Book A3, Page 569. DeKalb
Sternberg to David A. Rankin. 220 Acres.
- 1883 Deed. Recorded January 23, 1883 in Book A3, Page 603.
David A. Rankin to Edmund E. Farrel. 80 Acres.
- 1918 Warranty Deed. Recorded November 30, 1918 in Book 95,
Page 528. Edmund E. Farrel to Leonard M. C. Larson
and Hjalmar Larson. Approximately 75 Acres.
- 1920 Warranty Deed. Recorded September 10, 1921 in Book 111,
Page 466. Undivided one-half interest from Hjalmar
Larson to Leonard M. C. Larson. Approximately 75 Acres.
- 1927 Corrective Deed. Recorded December 14, 1927 in Book
163, Page 227. Undivided one-half interest from Hjalmar
Larson to Leonard M. C. Larson. Approximately 75 Acres.
- 1961 Quit Claim Deed. Recorded December 1, 1961 in Book 952,
Page 409. Leonard M. C. Larson to The First National
Bank of Denver. 7.75 Acres.
- 1965 Deed. Recorded January 18, 1965 in Book 1203, Page 383.
Leonard M. C. Larson to Leonard O. M. Larson. 6.46 Acres.
- 1965 Corrective Deed. Recorded January 18, 1965 in Book 1203,
Page 388. Leonard M. C. Larson to The First National
Bank of Denver. 7.75 Acres.

1972 Quit Claim Deed. Recorded November 29, 1972 in Book 1832,
Page 403. The First National Bank of Denver and Leonard
O. M. Larson, trustees, to Leonard O. M. Larson. 7.75
Acres.